

Nothing alien about... SCI~FI VIDEO!

The release of MGM's 2001 — A Space Odyssey and Roadshow's The Day After highlight the continuing interest in video science fiction.

By Daryl Mannell



AS A young lad, I remembered spending many a wet Saturday afternoon, when not at the football, watching the matinee movies. I was treated to a myriad of bizarre alien worlds, met horrifying monsters and witnessed the triumph of good over evil.

My taste in films has gradually changed since those B-grade science fiction thrillers of the late '50s and '60s, but my sense of wonder and adventure remains just as strong.

Science fiction has always been a specialised, but still popular, subject matter for both film makers and filmgoers ever since the first hand cranked cameras were invented. Now with the fast speed, high technological world of the '80s, science fiction is proving to be more popular than ever.

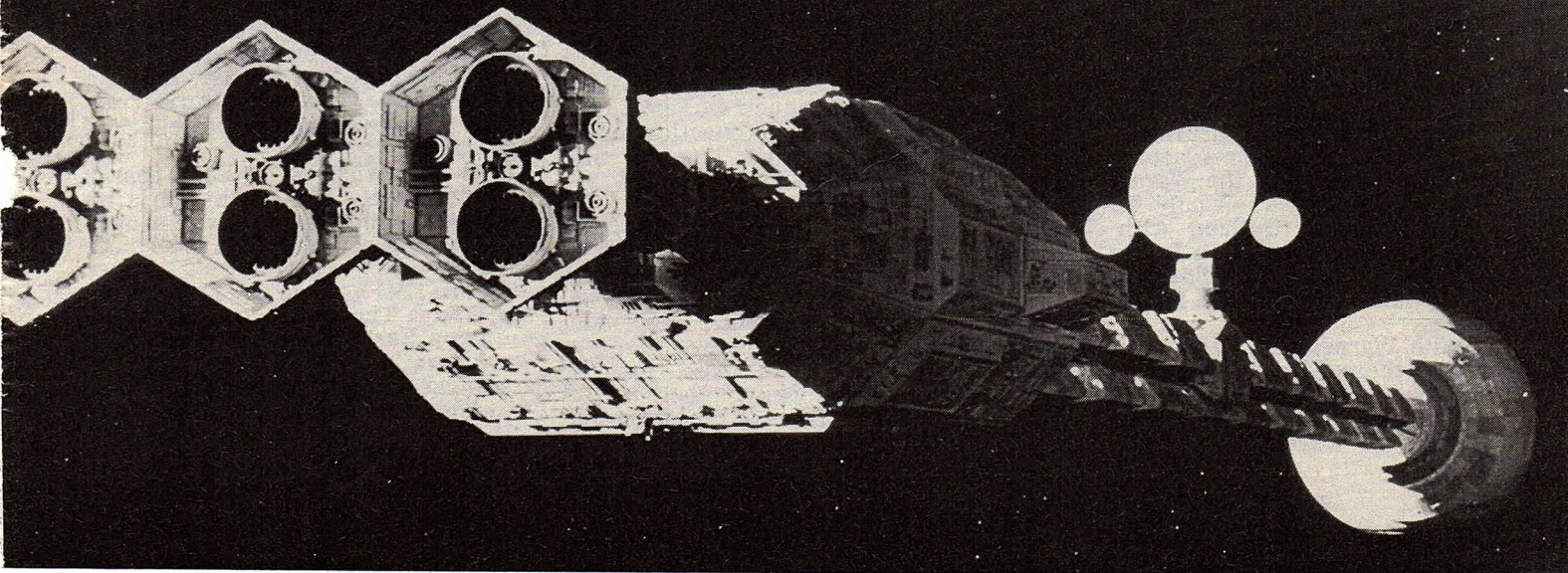
The advent of video has given the public ready access to some of their favorite movies, many of them science fiction. With **Communications & Entertainment Limited (PBV)** releasing Stanley Kubrick's science fiction masterpiece, *2001 — A Space Odyssey*, on video through their MGM/UA label, interest in science fiction has been stirred up again.

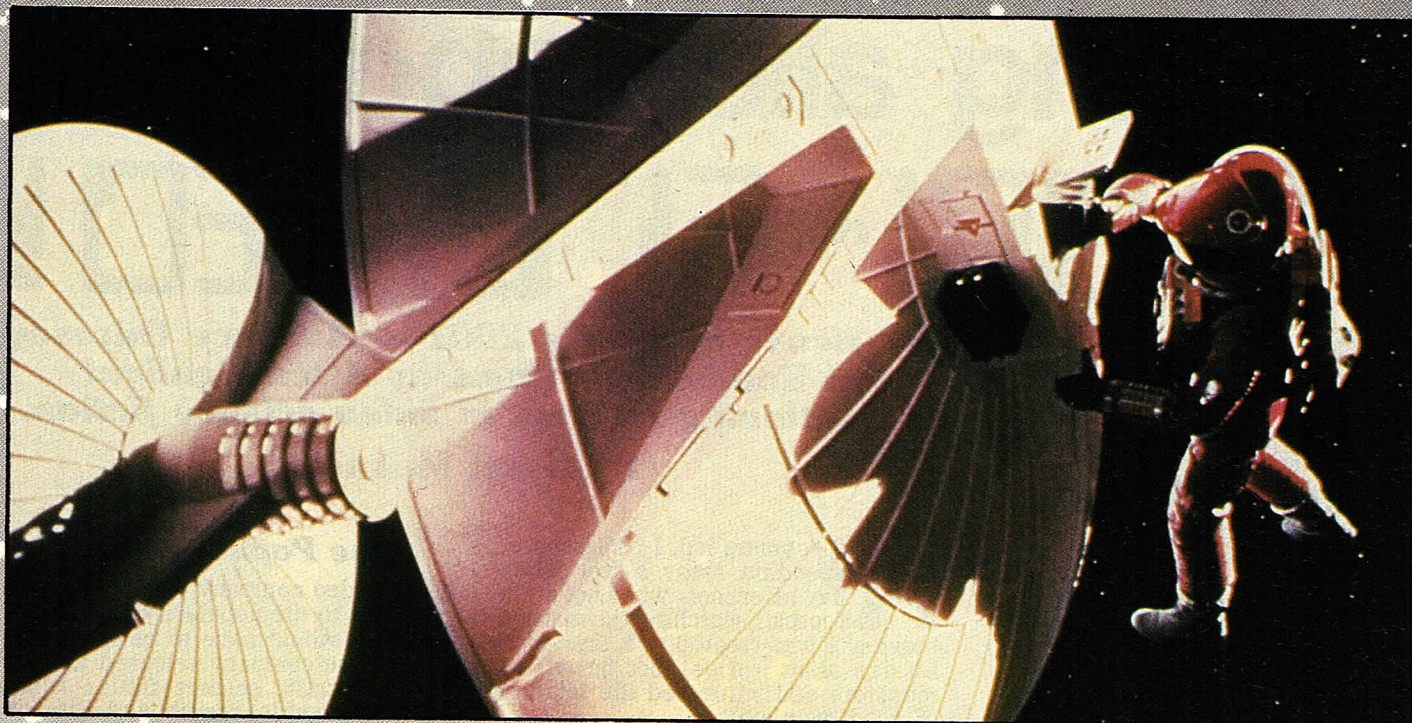
The Popular Alien

If any video company owes a debt of gratitude to the popularity of science fiction, it would have to be CBS/Fox. In 1980 the company released Ridley Scott's horrific science fiction film, *Alien*, on the video market and instantly created one of the first of Australia's video smash hits. The availability of *Alien* did a lot to make home video popular in Australia.

CBS/Fox followed this success with another science fiction blockbuster, namely **George Lucas' Star Wars**. According to Mr **Barrie Roberston**, *Alien* would probably be the company's top-selling film with *Star Wars* close behind. It is interesting to note that both *Alien* and *Star Wars* were awarded a 1973 **Australian Video Award** each for sales — a fitting tribute to their success.

CBS/Fox has also had success with other science fiction titles such as the *Planet Of The Apes* series of five movies. Other popular titles are *Saturn 3* with **Kirk Douglas** and **Farrah Fawcett-Majors**; *Quintet*, a **Robert Altman** film starring **Paul Newman** and *Quest For Fire*, which according





MGM/UA's "2001 — A Space Odyssey".

to Mr Robertson, did surprisingly well considering its very specialist nature.

Mr Robertson feels science fiction is both a popular and constant field that should do well for both distributors and outlets. His only big question is: When is George Lucas' sequel to *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, coming out on video?

Sadly that answer lies with Lucas who is sitting on the video rights to the film.

Carman Bjerre from Warner Home Video agrees with Barrie Robertson about the popularity of science fiction. Like CBS/Fox, Warners has a strong catalogue of science fiction films. Heading the line-up is the futuristic action-packed Australian film, *Mad Max 2* and the ultimate super-hero, Christopher Reeve in *Superman* and *Superman 2*. All three titles have been exceedingly popular for Warners.

Another film which is becoming very popular is Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner*, starring Harrison Ford from *Star Wars* and *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. Ms Bjerre, a bit of a science fiction film buff, said she saw *Bladerunner* twice so she could take in all the visual elements. Considering how stunning *Bladerunner* is to watch, I don't find her claim surprising. I saw it twice for the same reason! Other popular titles from the Warners list are Ken Russell's visually powerful *Altered States*, *Outland* with Sean Connery, *Rollerball* with James Caan and *Battle Beyond The Stars*, a science fiction remake of *The Magnificent Seven*.

With Warners reverting to a sales policy, these fine science fiction titles will become widely available. *Bladerunner* and both the *Superman* films feature in Warners first "sale" release.

Ms Bjerre believes the future for science fiction is bright due to the vast improvements in technology. One future film from Warners that will wet the appetite of science fiction film buffs is *Twilight Zone*.

Spock on Video

CIC Taft has a strong line-up of science fiction films, especially if you're a fan of the popular science fiction TV series, *Star Trek*. CIC Taft has *Star Trek The Motion Picture*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and recently released is *Star Trek: Space Seed And The Changeling* which are two of the better known episodes from the TV series. With such a loyal following, the *Star Trek* cassettes have proved very popular for CIC Taft as well as the dealers who carry those titles.

Mr John Ogilvie pointed out that science fiction has been popular for CIC Taft as it has solid titles that move well. Another TV series which has done well for CIC Taft is *Battlestar Galactica* and its two sequels, *Mission Galactica* and *Conquest Of Earth*. Like *Star Trek*, *Battlestar Galactica* has its own following which ensures that there is always some demand for those titles.

Other science fiction offerings from CIC Taft are *Barbarella* with Jane Fonda, George Pal's famous film, *The War Of The Worlds* with Gene Barry, and two films from John Carpenter: *Dark Star*, his first feature film and *The Thing*, starring Kurt Russell. According to Mr Ogilvie, there are no science fiction films at this stage due for release from CIC Taft for the near future.

Video Classics is another company that has an impressive number of interesting science fiction titles. Dino de Laurentiis' fun-filled adventure film, *Flash Gordon*, still remains one of the top selling titles from Video Classics. Other titles include *Laserblast*, *Message From Space* with Vic Morrow, *Zero Population Growth*, *Firebird 2015* and the Howard Hawks/Christian Nyby classic, *The Thing*.

Joy Tennet from Video Classics says science fiction has proved fairly popular and Video Classics is planning to release a few gems in the near future. For nostalgia fans there are two early science fiction TV series: *Space Cadet Vol. 1 & 2* and *Tales Of Tomorrow Vol. 1 & 2* and for fans of terrible movies, the cult classic itself, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* which is so bad, it is bathing in a wave of popularity.

The Nasty E.T.

Thorn-EMI has a small but intriguing range of science fiction titles which is led by their recent release, *Extro*, a tale about a nasty extra-terrestrial. *Extro* is proving to be a top seller for the company.

The Man Who Fell To Earth marks David Bowie's film debut. It is an intelligent film that received a good deal of acclaim and proved to be quite popular.

Thorn-EMI has two *Dr Who* movies; *Dr Who & The Daleks* and *Daleks — Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* Both titles have been constant movers. One interesting and somewhat bizarre film is *Liquid Sky* which is perhaps best

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described as a punk/art/drug culture/science fiction film.

According to **Georgie Brown** from Thorn-EMI, Liquid Sky's sales exceeded all expectations considering how specialised it was. George also mentioned that Thorn-EMI has **Superman 3** due for future release which no doubt will prove to be immensely popular.

Communications & Entertainment Limited (PBV) is releasing the science fiction blockbuster, **2001 — A Space Odyssey**. Kubrick's film still remains a milestone in science fiction and no doubt it will prove to be a huge success, considering the vast promotion that CEL has planned for it. 2001 is being released on the MGM/UA label, which already boasts some of the most popular titles on video, including the well-known science fiction film **Westworld**, which stars **Yul Brynner** as a robot gunslinger. The Star Video label also contains two science fiction titles of note. **Futureworld** is the sequel to **Westworld** and stars **Peter Fonda**; and **Charly**, which was based on **Daniel Keys'** famous short science fiction story, **Flowers For Algernon**. Charly stars **Cliff Robertson**, who won an Academy Award for his brilliant portrayal of a mentally retarded man.

Evanne Gavrily says that CEL is very excited with the release of **2001** as they expect the film to create wide interest in science fiction. Evanne points out that **2001** still remains a unique film as it was the first of its kind.

Two Types Of Science Fiction

The other major distributor to carry a fairly large range of science fiction titles is **Roadshow Home Video**. **Gordon Bobbins** from Roadshow agrees that science fiction is a popular market. Gordon feels there are two types of science fiction films — those with horror elements and those with adventure. Heading the horror style of science fiction is **Scanners**, a film dealing with the horrific implications of telepathic powers. **Scanners** has been a huge success for Roadshow and would be amongst their top 20 sellers. Another horror type science fiction film is **Inseminoid**, which is a film along similar lines as **Alien**.

Of the action science fiction films, **Mad Max** easily remains one of the giants in the video industry. The Australian futuristic action film has been a smash hit around the world. **Yor** is an interesting title as it is set in both the future and the past. **Starflight One** is closer to science fact than science fiction as it looks at the

possibility of an accident happening with the space shuttle.

Gordon also mentioned a few future titles coming from Roadshow which include: **The Day After** (which we all pray will remain in the realms of science FICTION), **Exterminators Of The Year 3000**, **Buckaroo Bonzai**, **Empire Of The Ants** and **The Philadelphia Experiment**. A fine collection of titles to look forward to.

Other distributors have one-off science fiction titles of which a few are worth mentioning. **RCA/Columbia** has **Steven Spielberg's** box office hit, **Close Encounters Of The Third Kind** which deals with man's first meeting with an extraterrestrial race. **Syme Home Video** distributes **The Black Hole** on the **Walt Disney Home Video** label. The film deals with man's first attempt to enter a black hole in space.

Good For Business

From the video retailers point of view, science fiction is good business.

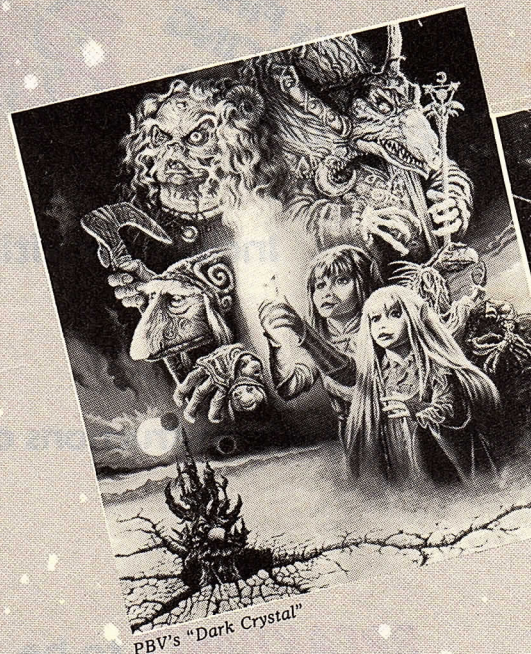
Mr Brian Torrance from Melbourne's **PAL Video** retail group said the better known titles from science fiction were very popular. Mr Torrens has a strong policy on rental appeal: if any film, including science fiction, has a strong rental appeal, then **PAL Video** will stock it. Mr Torrens will be interested to see how successful **2001** is on video. It is a quality film, but very dated he said.

Mr Norm Sortell from **The Entertainers Video** is quite happy with science fiction. Providing the product is of quality, science fiction will always prove popular. Many of Mr Sortell's regular customers enjoy science fiction and are always on the lookout for new titles. He is arranging his new store so the movies are in set categories. One of those categories will specialise in science fiction/fantasy, as those themes are popular with constant demand. Mr Sorell thinks **2001** should prove to be a popular title and is looking forward to its release and, as one with an extensive background in video marketing, his views are worth noting.

Mr Brian Appleyard from **The Video Movie Centre** in Western Australia is quite enthusiastic about science fiction. It is extremely popular, with titles such as **Bladerunner**, **Star Wars**, **Alien** and **Star Trek** constantly moving. Mr Appleyard feels science fiction is an area where titles automatically move because people search for them.

The future for science fiction on video is bright. Already there is an impressive list of titles available and that list is growing all the time. With both the distributors and dealers agreeing that science fiction is a popular field, the industry is set to meet the growing demands of science fiction film buffs.

V



2001

The year is 1968 and society is undergoing great upheavals. For America, Vietnam has become a nightmare as young American troops are held back by determined Viet Cong soldiers. The war which was meant to be rapid and effective now has no end in sight. In America there is growing unrest. Public demonstrations cry out for an American withdrawal from Vietnam. An entire generation becomes united as the values of their parents are questioned.

A film appears which caused wide controversy, but to Western youth, that film takes on far greater significance than anyone could have realised. That film was **Stanley Kubrick's** science fiction epic, **2001 — A Space Odyssey**.

Critics were, and always have been, divided in their opinion of **2001**. Some have labelled the film as being overblown, meaningless and deliberately obscure. Others have claimed that Kubrick's film remains the purest expression of science fiction ever to grace the screen. Yet, either despite or because of all the fuss, **2001** became both a financial success and, more importantly, one of the great cult films of all time.

The film begins at the dawn of mankind. A tribe of apes scratch out a bare existence from the dry African plain they live on. The primates live in constant fear from attack by other apes or wild animals. Suddenly a strange black alien monolith appears. The apes are mysteriously drawn to the object, and as they touch it, concepts are implanted in their minds. When an ape realises that a bone can be used as a tool, it becomes evident that the apes are beginning the long road to human evolution. Unfortunately

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From The Silver Screen To The Box

Swing Shift, The Stone Boy, Moscow On The Hudson, This Is Spinal Tap, Romancing The Stone, Misunderstood.

By Eric Scott

THE gorgeous, daffy duck of the real world, blonde and beautiful Goldie Hawn, makes her return to the screen in a different sort of role for her.

The film is **Swing Shift**, set in wartime America. Goldie, managing to look just as fresh as ever in the 1940s costumes, plays a young housewife whose husband enlists in the Navy the day after the Japs put paid to Pearl Harbor.

When she gets the news she's devastated, but her character is one that makes the best of bad situations, and quickly. She decides to do her bit for the war effort and gets a job in a factory riveting parts on aircraft.

It's there that her life starts to change. Her co-worker is Hazel, played by **Christine Lahti**, with a lot of warmth. Now, in the cosy pre-war days, Hazel was a neighbor who Goldie had been warned to steer clear of as she was a "bad type".

But now the two become friends and, thanks to Hazel's encouragement, the faithful, but weakening Goldie falls for Lucky, exempt from war service because of a heart condition. This is **Kurt Russell** (remember him as **Elvis Presley**, and lately in **Silkwood?**). The two have an ill-fated affair.

He gives an adequate performance as the lover, but it is Goldie's film and the interplay with her character and Hazel keeps the film in the top bracket.

It's Goldie's best since **Private Benjamin** (out on Warner Video). But for solid classic Goldie, try **Butterflies are Free or Foul Play** (on video from CIC-Taft).

Family Tragedy

Robert Duval has made many great movies. He's a great actor with an amazing versatility. My favorite is **The Great Santini** (out on Warner Video) where he plays the over-zealous disciplinarian soldier.

When that was released theatrically I rated it one of the top 10 films of the past 10 years.

Now he has a new one on release, which deals with true tragedy — the losing of a child through death. It is called **The Stone Boy**.

Duval is **Joe Hillerman**, father of two children, **Arnold** a young man, and **Eugene**, a 12-year-old. They live happily with Dad and Mum (**Glenn Close**).

One day the boys set off early in the morning to pick peas on the farm. **Arnold** takes the shotgun with him in the hope of bagging a duck. The accident happens and **Eugene** is shot dead. But **Arnold** seems to be uncaring, and so the family tragedy develops.

It's a no-action movie, but a deep one that grips in its own special way — and it has superb performances from **Robert Duval** and **Glenn Close**.

Leaves You Cold

Australian director **Fred Schepisi** (**Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith** on EMI) forsook his own country for the golden lure of Hollywood.

His latest epic from there is a sci-fi show called **Iceman**. An Arctic expedition finds a neanderthal man frozen solid. The party uses modern technology to revive the character then falls into arguing what should be done with him.

Not the greatest of films. It won't win any Oscars, but it has its moments.

Mork In Moscow

Robin "Mork" Williams won a lot of hearts as **Garp** in **The World According To Garp** (out now through Warner Video), and he looks like doing the same with his latest film, **Moscow on The Hudson**.

In keeping with his penchant for playing off-beat roles, this time he plays a defecting Russian. Not an athlete, spy or ballet dancer, but a saxophonist with a second-rate circus on a US tour.

He does his asking for asylum in a nicely open place — **Bloomingdale's Department Store** in New York. There, not only does he get his freedom, but makes friends with a security guard and falls in love with a salesgirl (played by **Maria Conchita Alonso**). Here, unlike the egg-laying **Orkiano**, **Williams** gets plenty of sex and we see some fairly erotic bedroom scenes.

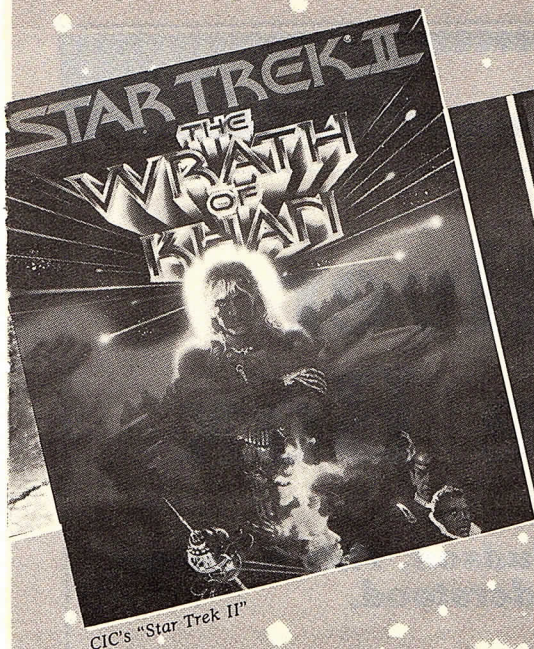
This one should be another winner for **Williams**.

Rock and roll — was it ever really like this? **This Is Spinal Tap** is a glorious send-up of the touring scene, the hype, boredom and fakery.

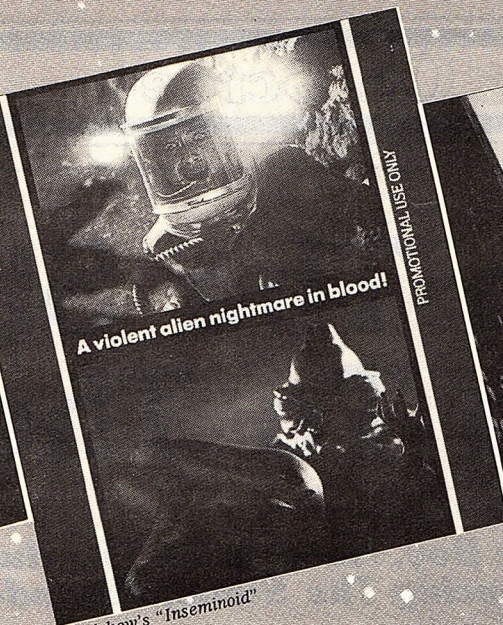
Spinal Tap is the name of a rock group which has been around for years and the facial creases and stiffening joints are beginning to show.

It is a mock documentary of a US tour of the band, which goes gloriously wrong most of the time as the band tries to keep playing the screaming heavy metal rock of the '60s.

It has the real look of a documentary, with cigarette smoke, dingy



CIC's "Star Trek II"



Roadshow's "Inseminoid"



Embassy's "Escape From New York"

A SPACE ODYSSEY . . .

ly, man also has the ability to misuse his marvellous gift — as one ape uses the bone-tool to kill another ape and thus also commit man to an equally long history of killing and destruction.

The film suddenly cuts to the near future where man has now become a limited spacefaring creature. We are treated to a magnificent visual array of spacecraft dancing through the heavens to the music of Johann Strauss' beautiful and famous waltz, *The Blue Danube*. We follow Dr Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester) on his journey from Earth to an orbiting space station then on to a moon base. Dr Floyd is sent to investigate a mysterious object that has been excavated near the crater Tyco. The object is an alien monolith which has been waiting for mankind to locate it for 4 million years. Once touched by Dr Floyd and the research party, the Monolith emits a high pitched signal to Jupiter.

The film cuts to 18 months after the incident with the monolith on the moon. We are aboard the spacecraft *Discovery* en route to Jupiter. Aboard the ship is Dave Bowman (Keir Dullea), Frank Pool (Gary Lookwood), three team members in suspended animation and HAL, the ship's onboard computer. The mission is a long one and the first signs of boredom are beginning to surface. HAL has been given human feelings and independent thinking to help with the mission, but is growing concerned that the human element of the ship's crew may jeopardise the mission.

While Frank is checking the main antenna, HAL dispatches a small space pod to cut his air line. Dave sets out in another pod to retrieve Frank's body but, on return, discovers that

HAL won't let him enter. Dave, who is not wearing a helmet, must enter via the emergency entrance which he does then proceeds to dismantle HAL's logic functions, rendering the computer harmless. Dave also discovers that during his absence, HAL has terminated the lives of the three crew members in suspended animation.

Once in Jupiter's orbit, Dave encounters another alien monolith and thus begins his journey beyond the infinite. Dave, in a small pod, enters the monolith via a "star gate" which is an eight-minute long psychedelic light show that is literally mesmerising. He is transported to an alien world where he is enclosed in a lavish Roccoco style room. There Dave meets "himself," but at various stages of his life.

Finally as a very old man in bed, Frank dies, but a monolith appears and Frank is resurrected as a "star-child," a futuristic foetus which is man's next step up the evolutionary ladder. Then we see the "star-child" orbiting the Earth, but at what period in time, we do not know. Nor do we know what the "star-child" intends to do next. Perhaps it doesn't know?

The plot of *2001* is quite simple and linear, but the symbolism and its interpretations have been endless. The "star gate" effect alone has been often equated to an "acid trip" and it is quite ironic that the film has been often labelled as "the ultimate trip."

Based on a short story called *The Sentinel* by Arthur C. Clarke, who also co-wrote the script with Kubrick, *2001* has become a landmark in science fiction cinema. The special effects are stunning, the story in the realm of genuine science fiction and not merely dressed-up melodrama and the concepts genuinely questioning. *2001* set

the standards for all future science fiction films, both in themes and visual elements. Many critics, including yours truly, are of the opinion that *2001* has yet to be equalled let alone bettered. In an interview, George Lucas once said he felt *2001* was a superior film to his *Star Wars*, which he made 10 years after Kubrick's film.

2001 was also important for some of the talent it generated. Douglas Trumbull, who built the "split-scan" device which created the "star gate" light show, went on to direct two other interesting science fiction films, *Silent Running* and *Brainstorm*, as well as supplying the special effects on stunning films such as *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* and *Bladerunner*. Also there is John Alcott, one of the two principal cinematographers on *2001*, the other being Geoffrey Unsworth. Alcott is one of the finest cameramen in the world and has shot films such as *Beastmaster*, *Greystoke* and some of Kubrick's later films such as *The Shining*.

Kubrick himself has become one of the most influential film directors of the '60s and '70s. His sense of perfection and distinct style have become a trait which has earned the man a large cult following. It is interesting to note that Kubrick, who is widely considered to be an "art" film director, has not made a financial flop, yet ironically he has never received an Academy award as best director!

The release of *2001* — *A Space Odyssey*, brings to the video screen a modern cinema masterpiece. It has been a long wait for both science fiction and film buffs but it was worth it. As an added bonus, the soundtrack is in glorious stereo.

V